Exorcise Panic Attacks With Regular Exercise

July 21, 2011

Physical activity isn't just good for physical health. People who regularly exercise are less sensitive to stressors that can trigger panic disorder, according to a study by researchers at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and the University of Vermont in Burlington and published in Psychosomatic Medicine.

According to Southern Methodist online news materials, researchers in the study gave questionnaires about physical activity and anxiety sensitivity to 145 adult participants with panic attack histories. Next, scientists asked the group to inhale carbon dioxide-enriched air, which typically causes such symptoms as dizziness, nausea, stomachaches, heart palpitations and shortness of breath.

Afterward, researchers calculated participants' anxiety sensitivity-a measurement of the extent to which people fear that they'll be harmed by such symptoms, which also gauges panic attack risks and other anxiety-related ailments.

What happened? Scientists found that participants who had regular, intense physical exercise exhibited less anxiety sensitivity than those who didn't.

"Anxiety sensitivity is an established risk factor for the development of panic and related disorders," said lead author Jasper Smits, PhD, an assistant professor of psychology and director of the Anxiety Research and Treatment Program at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "This study suggests that this risk factor may be less influential among persons who routinely engage in high levels of physical activity."

Smits added that exercise can't replace therapy or medication. But in combination with other methods, physical activity is a healthy way to stay strong in the face of anxiety.

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